

THE LAWTON FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS RECEIVES A REQUEST FOR PRAYERS AND SOLIDARITY FROM CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE FOR DR. BISCET AND ALL CUBAN POLITICAL PRISONERS FOR THEIR IMMEDIATE RELEASE FROM PRISON IN ANTICIPATION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION MEETING ON DECEMBER 14, THAT WILL ADDRESS POLICY ISSUES FOR RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN CUBA

Urgent Action

UNRESTRICTED: Can be used in general mailing lists, press, church magazines, open meetings.

Dear Friends,

I am writing to request your continued prayers for Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, a Christian human rights and democracy activist who has been imprisoned in Cuba for almost 2 years. CSW learned today that he was among 18 other political prisoners who were transferred to a hospital in the Combinando del Este prison in Havana.

In the past few days, a number of other political prisoners were transferred to the hospital in Havana before being released from prison altogether. There are hopes that Dr. Biscet will also be released to join his wife Elsa Morejón.

As many of you who have followed the case know, Dr. Biscet was detained almost 2 years ago, on December 6th, 2002. He was later sentenced to 25 years in prison along with scores of other human rights and democracy activists in a major crackdown on dissidents in March 2003.

He has been confined in a punishment cell for long periods of time over the past two years, has been denied food at times, and his health has suffered enormously. His detention came just one month after he had finished serving a three-year sentence for his human rights activities.

I would also like to ask that you pray for European leaders who must decide in the next few weeks how to react to the recent releases of political prisoners in Cuba. On December 14th, leaders from each of the European countries will meet to work out a common EU policy towards Cuba. There have been efforts from some countries, particularly Spain, but also the United Kingdom and Germany to mend relations with Fidel Castro's government which have been virtually non-existent since the March 2003 crackdown. One of the most contentious decisions that will be brought to the table is whether the EU countries should continue inviting dissidents and families of political prisoners to their embassies for national celebrations. This is a policy that has been strongly supported by leaders from EU countries that suffered under communist

governments, most notably former political prisoner, Vaclav Havel from the Czech Republic. It has also been of enormous encouragement to the families of political prisoners and dissidents, many of whom are Christians.

While CSW would welcome the release of Dr. Biscet, we remain concerned that hundreds more men and women remain in prison under horrendous conditions. One of them, Jorge Luis Garcia Perez or "Antúnez", who is also supported by CSW, has now been in prison since 1990, and like many others has very serious health problems. In terms of religious freedom, the information CSW has received seems to indicate that the situation is deteriorating significantly and pastors do not expect it to improve. We are concerned that the release of a few prominent prisoners may be a political ploy on the part of Cuba to improve relations with the European Union while arrests and mistreatment of scores of other, less well-known, dissidents continue under the cloak of obscurity.

Please pray for Dr. Biscet and his wife Elsa - while remembering the hundred of other political prisoners who remain in captivity. Please also pray for the leaders of EU, that their actions and decisions on December 14th would be inspired by a sincere desire for justice and respect for human rights in Cuba. Please also pray for church leaders in Cuba who continue to work in a state of uncertainty.

You may wish to consider writing to your MP to ask them to voice their support for human rights in Cuba, requesting the UK government to uphold this position at the December 14th meeting.

Thank you,

CSW Advocacy Team